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# AMERICAN PLAYS OF OUR FOREFATHERS

BY MONTROSE J. MOSES

WHAT benefit is there to be had from a careful reading of the American plays of our forefathers? They are mostly crude, largely trivial in plot, and, in their verse, imitative of better dramas abroad. Out of the many hundreds of paper-backed editions, which are the coveted prizes of book collectors, scarcely one of these old dramas holds the stage to-day; their influence upon the living theatre is a negligible factor.

Yet there is an essential need for the study of these American plays of our forefathers. I claim for them the same right of consideration that is asked for the polemics of Patrick Henry and James Otis, for the Indian stories of Cooper and Simms, for the backwoods novels of Paulding and Bird. They have the value of contemporary portraiture when they depict the figures of Washington and André and Jackson; and they retain some of the fire from the political skirmishes of Whig and Democrat. In other words, wherever a native product is fighting through raw material into expressive form; wherever it evolves in national consciousness, coincident with the awakening of social and political rights, such a play is compelled to reflect the forces of the times; it is of value because of the nearness of its intent to the conditions it purports to reflect.

Hence a study of American drama prior to 1870 is a survey of influences from which a nation gets its self-expression. Surely it would be strange if a people—a branch broken from the Anglo-Saxon stem—should repudiate its early expression merely because it smacked more of the culture from which it came than of the soil to which it consciously attached itself. We find the various *Vindications* of the New England churches and the many *True Relations* of the Southern Colonies thoroughly London and in no way Plymouth or Roanoke. Is it therefore strange that our first comedy, *The Contrast*, should be a pale

likeness of *The School for Scandal*? Do we deprecate the British parliamentary form of Patrick Henry's orations?

Squaring the early American drama with early American literature,—political, polemical, fictional and otherwise,—I believe that the native dramatist held his own surprisingly well. In fact, in the field of historical plays he probably had a higher quality of patriotic fervor than can be found in Bronson Howard, Clyde Fitch or William Gillette. I much prefer the *André* of Dunlap to the *André* of Fitch; the sprightly Revolutionary touch of Oliver Bunce's *Love in '76*—artificial though its manner be—is superior to any modern comedy of that era.

The same battle was fought by the early American playwright that was vigorously maintained by the early American novelists—a prejudice against Americanism in art, a dislike of homely characteristics, as being more native than aristocratic grandiloquence. However much our political ideals were jealously guarded and protected from foreign influence or modification, our culture ran contrary to the maintenance of home atmosphere.

Our early theatres were, in large measure, conducted on the lines of English theatrical tradition. The old Park Theatre, under Simpson, Wallack's, Brougham's, Burton's, Daly's, Palmer's—you found there the splendid legacy of old English comedy and the inspiring maintenance of Shakespeare well done. Only now and again did some robust personality, like that of Edwin Forrest, champion the cause of the American drama.

The many historians of the early theatre in this country acknowledge the unexplainable prejudice against native plays; when they were accepted for production, they were slipped across the footlights like thieves, trespassers in the night. Here is what W. B. Wood writes, in 1813, of James N. Barker's dramatization of Scott's *Marmion*:

The merit of the piece was positive, but the old difficulty remained. I knew the then prejudice against any native play, and concocted with Cooper a very innocent fraud upon the public. We insinuated that the piece was a London one, had it sent to our theatre from New York, where it was made to arrive in the midst of rehearsal, in the presence of the actors, packed up exactly like pieces we were in the habit of receiving from London. It was opened with great gravity, and announced without any author being alluded to. None of the company were in the secret, as I well knew "these actors cannot keep

counsel", not even the prompter. It was played with great success for six or seven nights, when, believing it safe, I announced the author, and from that moment *it ceased to attract*.

Insidious as such prejudice may be, it was none the less a potent factor in the slow fight of American literature for recognition, carried on by its own workers—like Poe and Cooper and Simms. Even as late as the 'eighties the manager A. M. Palmer deplored the fact that Bronson Howard had taken the Civil War, rather than the Crimean, for his dramatic theme, and thus frowned upon the writing of *Shenandoah*.

Heretofore the literary historian has neglected the study of early American drama in relation to the social forces inspiring it. I am sure that by so doing he has missed vivid material. And he has blotted out from his consideration aspects of taste that were very real to men like Irving, Robert Montgomery Bird, Hugh Henry Brackenridge, Cooper, Simms, and Kennedy. These men attempted the drama in no mere spirit of condescension. Simms was active in the history of the Charleston Theatre; Irving collaborated with John Howard Payne in a manner so vigorous as to demand more careful consideration. These men loved the drama as a form, they were flattered if their novels were selected for dramatization—though the melodrama of dialogue sometimes scared them and made them feel their florid romance misrepresented.

This close contact with the theatre was noticeable in every walk of life. Our early Presidents were friends of the actors, and corresponded with them as well as with the playwrights. One reaches the conclusion that never, since the 'seventies or 'eighties, has the playhouse in America been so closely in touch with the social life of the people. I like to run through Washington's expense book to measure how frequently he bought tickets for the play; I enjoy the correspondence between John Adams and our polemical dramatist, Mrs. Mercy Warren; and did not John Quincy Adams carry on a spirited debate with James H. Hackett, of Falstaff fame, regarding the plays of Shakespeare? It was a known thing in those days for legislatures to adjourn that an actor might be seen by the lawmakers.

The romance of the play in America, therefore, is the romance

of America in the making. The reminiscences of the actors recall the customs and habits when primæval forest gave way to the blazed trail and the stagecoach. To read what Tyrone Power, the elder, wrote of this country in the 'thirties, is to find reflected the pioneer crudeness of American condition. There is no better picture of early New York below Canal Street than Fanny Kemble offers in her vivacious *Journals*. Dunlap and Dr. Francis, in their stage records, present vivid pictures of after-Revolutionary atmosphere.

It is this social atmosphere that is, to me, the determining factor in the value of a study of early American drama. To some it may be of vast importance to settle whether the theatre in Williamsburg, Va., or the theatre in Charleston, S. C., or the theatre in New York, housed the first actors in America, and whether these Thespians arrived in 1756, or 1750, or 1703. For such I might explode a bomb by saying that the first actors to sail across seas were not those found in the West Indies and the Colonies, but those who came with Cortes, in 1524, and who formed the amateur company for the amusement of Champlain in the winter of 1606-7.

In the study of American drama I cannot go as far back as that, but we may say with certainty that 1714 marks the beginning of playwriting in this country—a bitter satire penned by Hunter, the Governor of the Colony of New York, against those persons and forces of Trinity Parish expecting of him outlets he failed to grant, by reason of which he was accused of political compromise with the Dissenters.

The play was called *Androborus: A Biographical Farce*, and, though printed, only one copy survives—once owned by David Garrick, Kemble, and the Duke of Devonshire, and now in the library of Mr. Henry E. Huntington, of New York. It was never acted. The censor might strongly object to the epithets and thinly veiled invectives and allusions in this piece. Everything is found to be based on actual incidents. Hunter was a friend of Addison and Steele; he knew the value of wit and satire as a lampoon. Here, in this manuscript, for the first time, the mirror is held to the face of American conditions. In recent years, W. J. Hurlbut wrote a piece for the theatre, *The Writing*

on the *Wall*, which dealt with tenement conditions in Trinity Parish. American dramas repeat themselves in subject matter.

Previous to the Revolution, poetic tragedy and Indian romance raised their heads almost simultaneously. Thomas Godfrey, Jr.'s *The Prince of Parthia* (1765) was the first play written and printed to be acted; and George Cocking's *The Conquest of Canada* (1766) was the second. Robert Rogers's *Ponteach* (1766) presents the Red Man with the same historical accuracy of detail that is later used by Parkman, but with more intimate authority. But there are secondary characters in this latter play which show conclusively, at the outset of American playwriting, that there was a strong attempt at realistic portrayal of frontier life, of government officials, and of the main characteristics of Colonial social relationships.

Take, for instance, this thumbnail sketch of trading ethics, from *Ponteach*:

M'DOLE.—A thousand Opportunities present  
 To take Advantage of their Ignorance;  
 But the great Engine I employ is Rum,  
 More pow'ful made by certain strength'ning Drugs.  
 This I distribute with a lib'ral Hand,  
 Urge them to drink till they grow mad and Valiant;  
 Which makes them think me generous and just,  
 And gives full Scope to practise all my Art.  
 I then begin my Trade with water'd Rum,  
 The cooling Draught well suits their scorching Throats.  
 Their Fur and Peltry come in Quick Return;  
 My Scales are honest, but so well contriv'd,  
 That one small Slip will turn Three Pounds to One. . . .

*The Prince of Parthia*, given a recent revival by the students of the University of Pennsylvania, first saw the stage under the direction of Hallam in 1767. At this time our native playwright made his bow before the colonial public. As a student of the College of Philadelphia, Godfrey had come in contact with the painter Benjamin West, and had been shaped by the same influences that affected the career of Francis Hopkinson. The latter was instrumental in writing *Dialogues* reflective of political allegiance and independence, characteristic of theatrical efforts made by students of the College of Philadelphia and the College

of New Jersey. Theatricals flourished both North and South. The colleges were the cradles of amateur players: at William and Mary, and Harvard, the Restoration spirit was maintained. But here, in a form used so successfully by Hopkinson, by Hugh Henry Brackenridge and Freneau, we come in contact with the temper of the time. At one moment these *Dialogues* flaunt *The Military Glory of Great Britain*; at another *The Rising Glory of America*. Now you get George III exalted, and then you have the fall of British tyranny. In other words, these exercises, fostered by the colleges, reflect Colonial resentment and individual pride.

These writers displayed a certain amount of literary feeling. Rogers was on sure ground with the Indians; Godfrey had the usual attitude toward romantic drama and Elizabethan verse one might expect from a Colonist. In possibly the same creative spirit George Sandys, on reaching the Virginia Colony, sat him down from his labors and penned a translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. But I find that in Mr. Archibald Henderson's definitive edition of *The Prince of Parthia* there is suggested a rich vein of culture forming the background for Godfrey, and in Mr. Allan Nevins's historical edition of *Ponteach*, there is attempted justification, well founded, of Rogers's fitness for writing Indian drama. Thus, in the future, might some student justify the modern frontier spirit of Colonel Roosevelt by the editing of his *The Winning of the West*.

The Revolutionary period is clearly demarked in the history of American drama. The various theatrical companies that had amused the Colonists with Shakespearean and Restoration drama found themselves abandoned by Acts of Congress at the commencement of war, just as they had been hemmed in before by Colonial Puritanical acts against performances of any sort within certain districts. One of the excitements of the stage history of this period is how the actor escaped the magistrates in Boston, in Hartford, and other towns!

No sooner were the theatres closed for the better conduct of the war than they were reopened by the British—in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, so long as Tory tenure of those cities was kept. Generals Clinton, Howe, Burgoyne were pa-

trons—more likely managers as well—of the playhouses under red-coat régime. In fact, Burgoyne was himself no mean dramatist. He ridiculed the enemy in a manuscript now lost, *The Blockheads of Boston*; which was immediately answered in stinging words of retaliation by Mrs. Mercy Warren, with her *The Blockheads, or, The Affrighted Officers* (1776). The study of the Tory theatre is as full of color as any other phase of early American social life. Major André was the popular scene-painter of the day.

But it is the polemical character of the playwriting done which adds to the pictured heat of the time. In an excellent pamphlet, written by P. I. Reed, as a college thesis,<sup>1</sup> it has been very convincingly maintained, not only for this period but for all native dramatic compositions before 1870, that there is a plentiful amount of realistic treatment of character in our supposedly crude drama. Mrs. Warren's *The Group* (1775), Jonathan Sewall's *A Cure for the Spleen* (1775), Brackenridge's *The Battle of Bunkers-Hill* (1776) and John Leacock's *The Fall of British Tyranny* (1776) are a mixture of polemics, of timely history,—close upon the event,—of correct portraiture and powerful, relentless caricature. It is the bombast, however worthy the sentiment, which sounds strange to modern ears. Leacock makes Washington say:

I have drawn my sword, and never will I sheath it till America is free, or I am no more. . . . Finding they cannot conquer us, gladly would they make it up by a voluntary free will offering of a million of money in bribes. . . . Blasted, forever blasted be the hand of the villainous traitor that receives their gold upon such terms—may he become leprous, like Naaman, the Syrian, yea, rather like Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, that it may stick to him forever.

Political figures, military personages, farmers, men and women in all walks of life, from the ladies and their beaux to slave servants with rudimentary negro dialects, are here portrayed, and are variously improved upon in years to come.

All of this suggests that even before Royall Tyler made his momentous visit to the theatre in New York—his first visit, like forbidden fruit—there was in the literary atmosphere a self-

<sup>1</sup> *The Realistic Presentation of American Characters in Native American Plays Prior to Eighteen Seventy.*



conscious desire to reflect the life of the time. *The Contrast* is a very evident copy of *The School for Scandal*. It shows on its face the mark of imitation, but it likewise shows certain definite and original traits. The society setting is the Battery, New York; the society spirit is the London drawing room. But the importance attached to this poor copy of Sheridan is that it definitely, and for the first time, launches the Yankee type on a long career of evolution, through various stages of caricature, through different lingo and every variety of costume inventiveness could prescribe.

The Yankee's marks of tongue are as distinguishing as his chin beard and striped trousers. In *The Contrast*, Jonathan says "dang it", "tarnation", "'tarnal", "gor", and uses other such New England phrases. He sings *Yankee Doodle*, and has a provincial horror of the theatre, though he is human enough to sit enthralled when he accidentally finds himself in one. From the very outset there is a downright, common honesty about the type—always emphasized on the stage—which lends striking contrast to the high-flown social ambitions of the society group, grubbing for money and for social prestige.

The success of Tyler with his comedy started William Dunlap on the road to writing plays and managing theatres. And thus, in one fell swoop, *The Contrast* is responsible for the Father of American Comedy and for the Father of the American Theatre.

The plays of our forefathers developed along broad lines. Though many of them are preserved, and differ in details of treatment, there are dominant streaks of development which may be succinctly summarized. The after-Revolutionary period of drama shows the conflict of views on the Constitution, when political parties were having their factional arguments and often splitting families, as Tory and Loyal feeling rent homes in the Revolution. Samuel Low's *The Politician Out-witted* (1788), *Federalism Triumphant* (1802), by an unknown hand, and many other similar pieces are illustrative of this interest. Let us eavesdrop and hear what the fathers of a youthful couple in love have to say, each to the other, of their political opinions—differences which threaten to upset the even tenor of their children's romance:

LOVEYET. I tell you it [the Constitution] is the most infernal scheme that ever was devis'd.

TRUEMAN. And I tell you, sir, that your argument is heterodox, sophistical, and most preposterously illogical.

LOVEYET. I insist upon it, sir, you know nothing at all about the matter; and give me leave to tell you, sir—

TRUEMAN. What—give you leave to tell me I know nothing at all about the matter! I shall do no such thing, sir—I'm not to be govern'd by your *ipse dixit*.

LOVEYET. I desire none of your musty Latin, sir, for I don't understand, not I.

TRUEMAN. Oh, the ignorance of the age! To propose a plan of government like the new Constitution. . . .

I should say, therefore, to those who asked what plays amused our forefathers, other than the standard repertoires brought them by visiting actors from London, or maintained by native actors of the same mould, that they were political in character, rural, historical, dealing with all the wars, and distinctly social. The American theatre kept close to the life about it—for Indians were among its audience and often appeared as participants on the playbills, and the darkey invited the early development of the minstrel, who was a much more highly developed type than the plays written for him would suggest. It is unfortunate that in the study of American plays—not as literature, but as vehicles of entertainment, and thus the measure of current theatre taste—these unliterary scripts are not regarded as being amplified by the skilled acting of the period. From 1800 to 1870 the American drama developed along lines encouraged by the tragic proportions of the actor Forrest, and the comedy skill of James H. Hackett. There was likewise that interest in the theatre which clings to literary groups of writers; and so we have dramatists of the Philadelphia school and of the Knickerbocker school, who were frequenters of first nights and approached the stage through encouragement from and personal touch with the players.

Native characteristics were continually developed, and thus we have as long a list of Indian plays as of Yankee pieces. Cooper did not usurp the field. And to add to the vividness of the type, Forrest gave memorable performances, beginning in

1829, of *Metamora, or, The Last of the Wampanoags*, which exactly suited his animalism and his colorful dignity.

Polite drama, otherwise known as high comedy, came to the fore when Anna Cora Mowatt wrote *Fashion* (1845), and this piece is typical of a long line of similar plays: from James N. Barker's *Tears and Smiles* (1807) and Mrs. Bateman's *Self* (1856) through Bronson Howard's *Saratoga* to the polished irony of Landon Mitchell's *The New York Idea*. The social ambitions of the *nouveau riche*, the directness of the American Yankee, undazzled by pretensions and wealth, the disrupting demands of climbers, seem crude in every point, but they were real to the dramatists and audiences brought up amidst Victorian morals and manners. Take Tiffany, in *Fashion*, and you will note what one writer has termed the "high pressure system" at work which characterizes present-day American business methods. The dialogue of these plays is not brilliant, the plots are meagre, but they are first-hand note-books of manners. In fact, we are told there were New York parvenues who did not care for Mrs. Mowatt after she had written *Fashion*!

The dramatists of our forefathers were always true to current events. Leacock's *The Fall of British Tyranny* introduced Washington for the first time in fiction. When Dunlap wrote his *André*, the Major was still alive, pointing to a contemporaneousness not often equalled.

Read John Murdock's *The Politicians, or, A State of Things* (1798) for conditions during Washington's second administration; turn to Dunlap's *Yankee Chronology* (1812) for the temper of the war; consult A. B. Lindsley's *Love and Friendship* (1809) for a reflection of the Embargo. Smith's *The Eighth of January* (1829) deals with Jackson's victory at New Orleans; Mead's *Wall Street, or, Ten Minutes Before Three* (1819) reflects some of the crudities of the banking system; Freemasonry is discussed in Kendall's *The Doleful Tragedy of the Raising of Jo. Burnham* (1832); and Mormon life of 1853 is discussed in a play by Thomas Dunn English.

Is there not some value to a kodak picture of Wall Street traffic in the following from Mead's play? Mr. Oldtimes goes to a bank with a check:

OLDTIMES. What a crowd here is, pushing and shoving, and counting money—*paper rags*. I can remember when good old gold and silver were all the money we had; and then every man was his own banker. But, now, we have banks, and brokers, and shiners, and shavers, and along with them your merchant tailors, and your merchant shoemakers, and your merchant this thing and that thing.<sup>2</sup>

There is no end to such plays, and most of them have served their contemporary purpose, and have not the literary merit to survive. Political parties, Clay and Jackson, trade conditions, fashions, French influence, the approach of Abolition—all these themes were very live to the dramatists of the day. And as such, they hold the picture of the moment. Here is a glimpse of the politician's grip on voters in Virginia, in 1824, a scene from L. Sawyer's *Blackbeard*:

TURPIS. (*A common people's candidate for representative to the State Assembly, to a constituent.*) I'll stand to it, I want no better friend than this jug, with what little I can put in slyly between drinks. The bottle's the best electioneerer, after all. . . .

MULEY. That's right, stick to the bottle. Treat the children with cakes, and their mothers with . . . punch: it will set their tongues running in your praise. . . . If you can gain the women, you are sure of the men, as the head of a ship is steer'd by the stern, or—

TURPIS. Or as a butcher steers a calf by the tail. Yes, I think we shall get the advantage of Candid, eh, Muley? For though he has got more book knowledge, I have got more impudence, which will stand me in its stead, with a majority. . . . Have you seen old Roughy? We must gain him; for he has more influence than any man in the county. His sons, and brothers, and uncles, and their connections could nearly elect a man of themselves. . . . But do you have me a jug of whiskey on the grounds. Zounds; I can't afford to give away brandy; it would cost six pence a vote, but with whiskey I can get them for half that.

This philosophy is easily sustained by the results of the democratic vote: Turpis won!

Tyler's *The Contrast*, in the rôle of Jonathan, gave us the first Yankee in the theatre. A book might well be written on this personage, so well held in the popular mind by the figure of Uncle Sam. Appealing to the groundlings at first, superior acting brought it to its highest form. There was pleasant rivalry

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in P. I. Reed's Thesis.

among the comedians of the day, whose power of mimicry and appreciation of Yankee eccentricity were their chief assets.

The form of entertainment that encouraged such Yankee delin-eation as that in which James H. Hackett excelled—in which he varied the evening with passages of New England drawl, of Irish brogue and of French vivacity—was probably suggested to him by the success of the English actor, Charles Matthews, in a similar programme. But the character of the Yankee, as a crea-tive being, was indigenous to the soil.

A long list of plays exploited the type. There were L. Beach's *Jonathan Postfree, or, The Honest Yankee* (1807); Samuel Wood-worth's pastoral, *The Forest King, or, American Farmers* (1825); Logan's *The People's Lawyer* and *The Vermont Wooddealer* (1844). The very names of the lanky countrymen are suggestive of the long drawl and the short manners: Horsebean Hemlock, Solon Shingle, Deuteronomy Dutiful, and Sam Slick.

George H. Hill and Dan Marble were two other actors who made the Yankee peculiarly their own. In fact, so great a repu-tation did they attain that one only had to address a letter to "Yankee" Hill to have it reach him, wherever he happened to be.

None of these actors had any far-fetched notion that they were helping to develop a phase of the American drama. They dropped into eccentric acting through their peculiar, specialized gifts, and plays were adapted to their ability. These were the requirements, when an actor asked a playwright for a drama—to fit him with a cloak of his artistic texture. All of the prizes offered by Edwin Forrest in the interests of American playwrit-ing were awarded on condition that their results might contain rôles suited to him. That is why our early American tragedy—examples of which are perhaps richer than in any other form—modelled, as was John Howard Payne's *Brutus*, on English lines, might be called the muscular school of American drama.

Strange to say, in the midst of all this romantic tragedy that went far afield in setting and plot from the homespun of America, there breathed, as for instance in R. T. Conrad's *Jack Cade* (1835), a spirit of liberty which overcame the foreign strangeness of subject and won American sympathy. When Henry De-Mille wrote his French Revolutionary *Paul Kowar*, he aimed to

appeal to the justice, the law abiding spirit, of the American people.

Forrest was not an exception to the rule in his demands on the dramatist. When James William Wallack, in 1836, offered one thousand dollars, through George P. Morris's *Mirror*, for "some striking and powerful American subject", he added the customary requirement,—“of course, I am desirous that the principal character should be made prominent, and adapted to me and my dramatic capabilities, such as they may happen to be.” Nathaniel P. Willis, though not competing, was fired through this announcement to essay his hand at drama, thus entering the field in a series of attempts, the most noteworthy of which was *Tortesa the Usurer* (1839).

Had it not been for Forrest, it is certain that at least nine, if not more, plays of veritable merit would never have seen the light—plays which were brought to notoriety through the power of highly stressed reading, distinctive of the period. These were John Augustus Stone's *The Ancient Briton* (1833) and *Metamora, or, The Last of the Wampanoags* (1829), Bird's *Pelopidas* (1830), *Oralloosa* (1832) and *The Gladiator* (1831), together with his *The Broker of Bogota* (1834), Richard Penn Smith's *Caius Marius* (1831), George H. Miles's *Mohammed* (1850) and Robert T. Conrad's *Jack Cade*. There was another playwright who did not come under the Forrest régime, but who created the one poetic drama, *Francesca da Rimini* (1853), which has persisted to recent times—George Henry Boker, who, in his correspondence said much about discrimination against the American author.

Even in the field of dramatization, the actor usually turned to literature for types suited to his capabilities. Hackett sought throughout the works of Washington Irving for American themes and characters suited to him. He prompted Kerr in the first version (1829) of *Rip Van Winkle*; he attempted, with small success, a play based on the *Knickerbocker's History of New York*; he encouraged the backwoods drama, when he persuaded James K. Paulding to write for him *The Lion of the West*, containing the rôle of Colonel Nimrod Wildfire.

There was another species of play encouraged by the theatre

of our forefathers' day—the drama of local interest, centering about the cosmopolitan life of the city—especially of New York: John Brougham's *Life in New York* (1856), Dion Boucicault's *The Poor of New York* (1857), and others of like character, culminating in Augustin Daly's *Under the Gaslight* (1867). Such plays created two city types, the discharged soldier of the Civil War, who became a messenger-boy, and Mose, the fireman, who, as delineated by the actor Chanfrau, became the idol of the Bowery.

But, even with this rich welter of dramatic materials, the theatre, until Tom Robertson's time in England, was dominated by stereotyped melodramatic situations which gave opportunity to Dion Boucicault, the "hack" dramatist of the day. Otherwise, the bulk of material for stage presentment was adapted from French and German sources. This habit of translating was pernicious to the native product and began with Dunlap's arrangements of Kotzebue; it filled much of the writing energy of Augustin Daly. Then came the "cup and saucer" plays, with their new methods of acting, and the modern manager with his new methods of exploiting. And the era of our forefathers was at an end.

And these dramas, so full of contemporaneous detail, were put upon the shelf, where, as far as the living theatre is concerned, they may remain. Their real flavor was partly due to the acting which served to keep them alive. The texts were the short-hand delineations for the player to fill and round out. Had it not been for John E. Owens, where, for instance, would have been the substance of Solon Shingle, as contained in the printed text of *The People's Lawyer*?

Up to 1870, except in these vaudeville excellences, with which our theatre was made native, there was written scarcely a play worthy to be called literature. But there is no disputing that these varied pieces served their varied theatrical purposes. And that they reflected the immediate interests of the day can be clearly seen. In type, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a play is scarcely readable. The early versions of *Rip Van Winkle* are crude. *Metamora* was never published, and, after Forrest's voice was stilled, the manuscript passed slowly out of sight; in its

entirety it is not yet located. Only now after many years of obscurity have the plays of Robert Montgomery Bird been published for the first time, and their value is hardly in their poetic distinction, but in the flavor they still contain of a highly colored emotion. There is a list of missing names from the dramatic library of the past. Murdock's *Davy Crockett*—where is it? And where Benjamin E. Woolf's *The Mighty Dollar*, with the famous Judge Bardwell Slote, M. C., so vividly played by W. J. Florence? Where is Mark Twain's *The Gilded Age*, whose Colonel Mulberry Sellers stepped forth a living creation under the art of John T. Raymond? Yet these plays represented the popular taste of theatregoers in the days of our forefathers. With their passing, a distinct era passed also. But their types persist in the modern play.

We even look askance at Mrs. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which is not now allowed general circulation in our schools, which, in its dramatized form, seems as impossible as the ten-, twenty- and thirty-cent melodramas we have rejected on our stage, but accept with equanimity in our movies. Mrs. Stowe, you will recall, refused to have the book dramatized on the score that any Christian movement—such as that for the abolition of slavery—would be contaminated by its connection with the loose morals of the theatre. She never received a cent from the thousands of performances given of the play. If we to-day refuse the dramatization, it is merely because the issue is over, the technique of the theatre has changed, and there remain only exaggerated types amidst lurid situations. This paper will have been written in vain if it is not realized that apart from the contemporary impress of manner and character, the bulk of the plays of our forefathers are valueless and dull. In some of them there is literary quality, but when these are found they are a surprise and not the general rule. Yet no student of American manners and customs can avoid them. A past life is their present redeeming trait.

MONTROSE J. MOSES.